19-02-2024 CHRISTOPH SECKLER - TRANSCRIPT

2 SPEAKERS

Gregor Kipping
Christoph Seckler

Duration

28m 30s

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:03] Gregor Kipping

So a warm welcome from my side. My name is Gregor Kipping. I'm a research assistant at the University of Münster and University of Liechtenstein, and I'm a research affiliate at the ERCIS at the European Research Center for Information Systems. Today we have our next interview for the DSR Academy project. I'm very, very glad and thankful that we have Christoph Seckler with us today from the ESCP Business School. He holds the Chair of Entrepreneurial Strategy at ESCP in Berlin, and he is also the Academic Director of the U-SCHOOL and he co-founded the Center for Design Science in Entrepreneurship. So welcome, Christoph. I'm very happy you're with us, and maybe you can also introduce yourself to us.

[00:01:03] Christoph Seckler

Yeah, and many thanks, Gregor, for having me here. This is actually a great pleasure, and I'm very much looking forward to it. So, as you said, my name is Christoph Seckler. I'm an assistant professor at ESCP Business School. I have a keen interest in design science. I believe that design science is actually important and very fruitful to solve real world problems. This is why we also founded the Center for Design Science in Entrepreneurship at ESCP. It's a very inclusive center, and we try to adopt a bit of the design science approach for the entrepreneurship and innovation fields. We learn much from the IS field and also, you know, interact with different fields to make an impact in this regard. This is what brings me to design science.

[00:02:00] Gregor Kipping

That's great. That's great. So, what is your current position and maybe a little bit of a history of your positions you had there?

[00:02:11] Christoph Seckler

Yeah. So, my current position is that I'm an assistant professor, a junior professor, at ESCP Business School. Before that, I was a postdoc at Leuphana University and also spent some time at Oxford University. And particularly during my post-doc years, I was very much interested in one philosopher. His name is Mario Bunge, and he's one proponent of the philosophy of technology. So this is actually how I got into the technology design science space. I was absolutely fascinated by this clear and broad thinking. Then I got to know, also during my post-doc years, the design science approach, and this is a bit of how it all combined and how I, then, developed this keen interest in design science. 1.5 years ago, I joined ESCP, and this is how I got here.

[00:03:18] Gregor Kipping

That's great. Actually, I was initially very fascinated. In Liechtenstein, we also have entrepreneurial studies. So I was fascinated as I read then that you were working on this topic of design science in entrepreneurship. So yeah, that was quite.

[00:03:41] Christoph Seckler

Yeah. So maybe as a background also for the listeners, who I guess are more familiar with the information systems field. As in information system design science is a pretty established research approach. This is only,

you know, this is only more recently coming to the entrepreneurship and innovation field. And we think it's a great fit because, as entrepreneurship and innovation scholars, we're always about building, in this case, organizations or building some kind of innovation. So the research approach actually fits well, but it's, you know, only been very recently introduced to the entrepreneurship literature, mainly by Dimo Dimov and Henrik Berglund, also Georges Romme, who imported some of his ideas from the management field. This is a bit of how it comes together.

[00:04:36] Gregor Kipping
That's great. So you also co-founded the Center for Design Science and Entrepreneurship. Can you tell us maybe a little bit about what you're doing there?

[00:04:48] Christoph Seckler
Yeah. So the Center for Design Science has a bold vision. The vision is that by 2030, entrepreneurship and innovation scholars actually, are recognized to contribute to the betterment of society and environmental issues. So having a clear, real world impact, and we think that enterpreneurship and innovation scholars can do that in various ways. And there are great ideas within these fields that can contribute to that. And this is what we're, trying to achieve. So, how we do this is mainly through three things. The first one is that we publish designs science within the entrepreneurship and innovation space, we try to use design science to solve real world problems. So, for example, how to invest in the future of food, how to design innovation accounting systems, but also more general topics like, how could design science look for the entrepreneurship field? So more methodological pieces. So this is the first pillar. The second pillar is that we want to serve as a platform for community. So we have the feeling that, in the entrepreneurship and innovation field, there are many people who are idealist in a way, who want to have an impact with their research, who want to contribute to a better world, and we want to bring them together to build a community around this research approach, and the reason for that is that. In the entrepreneurship and innovation field, there is yet little DS research. So we have different small groups across the globe that are working on design science, but it's kind of, you know, they're kind of unconnected so far. So we want to serve as kind of a bit of a platform to create formats and to create exchanges. And then the third thing is that we want to be a platform to connect this community with real world challenges. So, for example, by policymakers, by companies, by whoever has a challenge or an opportunity that they want to tap into. And then we connect this opportunity or problem with researchers who are interested in working on that. And this is a bit of what the center does.

[00:07:34] Gregor Kipping
Very interesting. Thank you very much. So, today I also have the pleasure to talk to you about your paper, Design Science in Entrepreneurship: Conceptual Foundations and Guiding Principles. So, we are in this field, this design science and entrepreneurship. I think you wrote this paper back with René Mauer and Jan vom Brocke. So, maybe you can tell us something about this paper. Why did you write the paper in the first place? So you already mentioned all these insights from your career and how you got to this merging topic. So, what was the initial idea?And why did you write the paper with these two scholars?

[00:08:30] Christoph Seckler
Yeah. A very hands-on thing that motivated us there. So, imagine the following situation: we were, René Mauer and myself, we were enthusiastic about the potential of design science. We thought this is absolutely the way to go. Then, at one point, we met Jan vom Brocke, who obviously is kind of one of the most published design science scholars in the information system field, and we clicked very easily. At this point, it was still that when at ESCP, we were promoting design science also beyond the boundaries of ESCP. We

always had a couple of questions that were raised. Critical questions about design science. This is probably due because it's so new to the entrepreneurship field and innovation field. These questions were fundamentally A: Is this science or is this just consulting? And then the second question is, when we talk to people and we said: Okay, look, this is why we believe it's a valid scientific approach. And then they asked us, Yeah, okay makes sense what you're telling us. And I've also, you know, seen these papers, or I've also been asked to review these papers, but, you know, how do I do it? You know what? What are the criteria? They look different, you know, they feel different. And we feel kind of a bit lost. Is there something that you can share? So, this was the starting point for this paper, and then we wanted to talk about why do we think design science is a distinct scientific approach on par and complementary to explanatory research, or as we call it, basic science, and how it is related but different from practice or consulting. So this is the first part of the paper, and then the second part builds on this conceptual framework. We proposed a couple of guiding principles that we hoped could, you know, provide some guidance, both in reviewing the papers but also in doing it.

[00:11:00] Gregor Kipping
So maybe some of our listeners have read your paper already. So, one of my questions would be, What are you particularly proud of from the main contributions of your paper?

[00:11:18] Christoph Seckler
Yeah. So, I think what we have achieved to a certain extent is to make a good argument of why we think design science is a scientific approach. And why it's different from consulting, distinctly. And I think this is kind of conceptually an important step to legitimize design science within the entrepreneurship and innovation field. And this is, I think, the contribution. This is a big contribution that I hope this paper can make.

[00:12:08] Gregor Kipping
Would you change something in the paper if you would write it today?

[00:12:15] Christoph Seckler
That is a good question. So I think yes. In hindsight, I think we always know much more. I think one thing that I would elaborate on a bit is the scientific method. So, the argument within the paper is that design science is a scientific approach because it uses the scientific method. Now, the question is, what is the scientific method in the first place? And here we draw on the thinking by Mario Bunge on what the scientific method is within a realist framework. And he says, Okay, look, the scientific method is basically a structured procedure, which can kind of be, you know, in a shortcut, described as, you know, you pose a question against some body of literature, and then you do some structured method work. And then you see, you know, how the outcomes are actually doing with regard to what we already know. So it kind of nicely relates to the structure of articles where you're at the front end, kind of say, Okay, look, this is what we know. Then you apply some methods, and then, in the end, you say, Does this make sense with regard to what we know? Right. And so this is very central to the argument in the paper. But we did not elaborate much on the scientific method. We spent some time on it. But I think actually we should have made it clearer and spent some more time on it because it is so central. Yeah.

[00:14:13] Gregor Kipping
So maybe one question that I thought about reading your paper. You wrote that you argue for a more balanced approach in DSR. So one that acknowledges and addresses the fact that understanding a problem is only halfway to solving it. I found this quite insightful. And maybe you can elaborate on this shortly.

[00:14:43] Christoph Seckler

Yes. So this is an idea that is actually not coming from us but from Joan van Aken, who popularized design science in the management field. I thought there's much to the sentence; actually, this is capturing much of how we think about design science. We think that design science should not be the only approach that we take in entrepreneurship research, but it is one important approach. And currently, we see an imbalance in the entrepreneurship field, particularly dominated by descriptive and explanatory research. And we think this doesn't make sense. We think you need to have an equal-handed kind of approach, an ambidextrous approach to it. Because with explanation, you can analyze a problem or a solution. But it is the design bit that actually gives you kind of another means and relationship. This is what we mean by it. So to give you an example from the real world, just because we understood COVID-19 at one point and we knew, okay, there's this COVID-19 virus, this did by no means mean that we already knew how to kind of, you know, fight COVID. And it is the second part, which is also important, we believe, particularly for professional fields like entrepreneurship and innovation, or more general management and IS fields. And we don't use this approach much. In doing that, we just miss the second part of the medal, if you want. So we are too one-sided. So we're explaining everything. But we do not provide kind of in-depth insight on how to solve problems. And I think this is a way that we need to rediscover.

[00:16:58] Gregor Kipping

Thank you very much. So, maybe one question about the design paper process. What was the hardest moment or decision you had to make during the design paper process?

[00:17:16] Christoph Seckler

Yes, so there was indeed a crucial moment and a crucial decision that we had to take. There were three authors. Right. So it's Jan vom Brocke, René Mauer and myself. I was very keen on establishing a framework based on Bunge. So the framework is kind of importing the philosophy of technology into design science in the entrepreneurship field to kind of clarify why design science is a scientific approach and how it is different from practice, but also explanatory research. So it was kind of central for me and, to a certain extent, also for René, but he's not as fascinated by Bunge as I was. And at one point, we had the discussion whether we should drop Bunge. Because Bunge is kind of abstract and a bit difficult to assess and access. It's kind of, you know, it's a philosopher. So it's kind of a bit of wild stuff. So we thought about whether we should just drop it to make the paper easier. And then we decided, the three of us, that no, actually, we think this is a valid and novel way of looking at design science. And it makes sense to use it as an organizing framework and also for presenting the guiding principles. So this made us then decide to keep it. There were actually quite intense discussions, and I don't know whether, you know, the paper would be smoother if we took it out. Personally, I'm happy that we kept it in because I think it gives it a distinct perspective that is rooted in the philosophy of technology. So it gives a kind of well-rooted foundation to then develop the argument, at the expense of being probably a bit difficult and a bit abstract on the other hand.

[00:19:38] Gregor Kipping

Thank you, Christoph. Maybe we come with one question back to our listeners. What would you recommend to young or maybe starting DSR researchers regarding publishing DSR in IS and also in entrepreneurship with respect to your experiences conducting DSR?

[00:20:04] Christoph Seckler

Yeah. So I can mainly speak for publishing in entrepreneurship, as I'm an entrepreneurship scholar. I think they're probably better interviewees to talk about what publishing IS. In general, I believe, we just had a session with Jan vom Brocke, and he put it well. I think it is important to engage with real-world problems to

see what are the most important pressing problems. To see whether there can be some kind of entrepreneurial innovation solution. So can the body of knowledge in entrepreneurship and innovation somehow talk to these problems and potentially solve them? And then take it from there. So I think having an exciting problem or opportunity to tackle is key, because unless you have a good problem or opportunity, then everything else, you know, if it's not worth doing, then it's also not worth doing well. This is probably the essence of the thing. So my first, or the recommendation, the fundamental recommendation would be to tackle a problem that matters both for practice and for literature.

[00:21:40] Gregor Kipping
So maybe one more question about this. What would you generally desire for the design science research field? Is there any point that comes to your mind initially?

[00:21:57] Christoph Seckler
Absolutely, absolutely. So again, I speak more for the entrepreneurship field because that's better. So, I would hope that entrepreneurship scholars are increasingly using design science to kind of rebalance the explanatory and design science approach. I think this is much in line with what particularly younger entrepreneurship scholars are aiming to do. So a lot of them are interested in making an impact and doing impactful work. I would hope that we get to a point where design science is a well accepted research approach on par with explanatory research. And again, here, I don't say that we should only do design science or only do explanatory, but I think they're really two sides of the same coin. And currently there's a bit of an imbalance, at least that's what I think.

[00:22:59] Gregor Kipping
So what has been your experience in this regard for the last two years when you talk to other entrepreneurship scholars? Do you think other researchers are very much interested in also starting in this field?

[00:23:21] Christoph Seckler
Yeah. I see that we are currently at a point where it has actually traction. So I have the feeling that, at the beginning, people were rather skeptical about what we were talking about because they didn't know the term design science. They didn't know whether it would be a proper thing. I think right now we are at a point where increasingly a lot of people say, Hey, this is actually, yeah, this is an interesting approach. Maybe we should use it a bit more. So I absolutely see traction there. But it's not only a personal feeling; but I can also see it in our top journals. So we just had, in 2023, an editorial in the top journal in entrepreneurship on what design science is and how to do it. We see proper design science studies published within entrepreneurship, also in ETP, in the Journal of Business Venturing and in the Academy of Management Review. The Academy of Management Journal, which is also publishing quite a lot of entrepreneurship-related research, just put out an editorial in which they call for more research that is researching forward. So very much speaking to the approach that design science is taking. So I personally think that this is currently the time to engage in design science. I personally believe, but obviously I'm totally biased. I think this is the approach that will skyrocket within the next few years. For a very simple reason: because it helps to solve real-world problems. And I think increasingly people in academia become aware that it is important, that it can be done, and that with their research and their thinking, they can solve real-world problems. And maybe, you know, people who have the time to think for their living should also do that. And again, explaining is a first step, but designing is the second important step.

[00:25:47] Gregor Kipping

Thank you very much. Perhaps as a last question, because I also read your paper with great interest. Have you an example for us for a design science research project in entrepreneurship? Just to get an idea, what is, I would say, very interesting and special about your field?

[00:26:11] Christoph Seckler
Yeah. So there are a couple of great examples of design science in entrepreneurship. One, very well known mainly in practice is actually the Business Model Canvas. The Business Model Canvas was rooted in the PhD thesis of Alexander Osterwalder and was then popularized through a series of books. So this is a great example which also, you know, spread across different disciplines. There's a fantastic study in science by Michael Frese and colleagues in which they develop and test a training for Western African countries to see whether it performs better in comparison to a world bank training that they have rolled out in 50 countries. And they show that the psychologically inspired training that they developed actually performs much better, which is fantastic, you know, to get people out of poverty and to create real world impact. Fantastic work there by Georges Romme and his group. They've been much thinking about how to transfer technology from universities to society within Europe, which is a big issue. And they've been particularly thinking about university spin offs to kind of market ideas which have been developed within universities. So there's plenty, plenty of stuff going on and important work as I think.

[00:27:48] Gregor Kipping
Thank you very much. Of course, I hope that this traction continues.

[00:27:53] Christoph Seckler
I hope so too.

[00:27:54] Gregor Kipping
But I believe in this. So, yeah, I have to say thank you very much for your time and for your very, very valuable insights into this field of design science and entrepreneurship.

[00:28:10] Christoph Seckler
I have to thank you. It was a great pleasure doing this interview. I hope to see you soon again and hope to see some more design science within the entrepreneurship field.

[00:28:23] Gregor Kipping
Thank you very much, Christoph.

[00:28:27] Christoph Seckler
Bye, Gregor

END OF TRANSCRIPT